



Dirkie Uys

The Official version

After the massacre of Piet Retief and his men by Dingaan (the Zulu king) on 6 February 1838, a number of Voortrekker camps were also attacked by Zulu warriors. It was a dark time for the crushed Voortrekkers, most of whom wanted to leave Natal. However, the Voortrekkers persisted and vowed that they would not leave Natal before Dingaan was punished for the murder of Pier Retief.

These Voortrekkers appealed to other treks, particularly those of Piet Uys and Hendrik Potgieter in the Orange Free State, for assistance. Both treks send out commandos to help, including Piet Uys and his son, Dirk - a.k.a "Dirkie" (whom is reported to have been 12 at the time). During the subsequent Battle of Italeni, Piet Uys was mortally wounded by an assegai while riding to the rescue of two of his cornered men. The rescue company had to flee due to the strength of the Zulu forces and Piet Uys, being badly wounded, dropped from his horse and he told the rest of the men to try to save themselves.

Dirkie Uys was ahead of his father with the rest of the party when he heard his father ordering his men to leave him where he had fallen. Seeing the Zulus closing in on his father, Dirkie Uys turned around his horse, shouting "I will die with my father", and charged. Reaching his dying father and being unable to leave him at the mercy of the warring Zulu fighters, Dirkie stuck by his side, fighting off as many of the warriors as he could before they were both finally overtaken and stabbed to death. These events is depicted on one of the historical friezes of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria.



Variations on the Tale

Many historians have a different opinion on how old Dirkie was in April 1838. His age is reported by different sources as twelve, thirteen and fifteen. However, several sources put him at only twelve years.

The historical reports also differ on the exact chain of events. According to one version, Dirkie, after heading back towards his dying father, saw his father being hit by the Zulus. He shot three Zulu warriors before being forced to assassinate his own horse. Dirkie fell next to father after which both were stabbed.

However, according to another version, Dirkie was at his father's side from the outset and took a stand alongside his father to resist the onslaught of the overwhelming Zulu warriors. One expedition even said that Dirkie was first stabbed and his dad just after that.

Conclusion

Regardless of the exact chain of events or the exact age of Dirkie, everyone agree on the following:

Dirkie, being an adolescent, refused to leave his father's side in the face of danger. Together, side by side, they fought and died.



A Monument was erected in honour of Piet & Dirk Uys. It is situated in Somerset West, less than an hour's drive outside Cape Town. It commemorates the loss of these two war heroes, but also the loss of the lives of all of the many other men, women and children that succumbed during this turbulent time in South Africa's history. The monument comprises a stone bench, fashioned after an ox wagon wheel, as well as an ox wagon atop a stone structure bearing the date 1938 to celebrate the centenary of e Great Trek. The monument faces true north and is situated on the large piece of land between two churches.

They will forever be remembered and celebrated as heroes.